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The Central American Peace Process: Short-Term Prospects [REDACTED]

An Intelligence Assessment

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The Central American Peace Process: Short-Term Prospects

An Intelligence Assessment

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September 1989

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The Central American Peace Process: Short-Term Prospects [REDACTED]

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 5 September 1989
was used in this report.*

The Central American presidents, in reaching the Tesoro Beach and Tela agreements this year, believe that, by giving the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS) responsibility for disbanding the Nicaraguan Resistance, they have resolved their most vexing regional problem. [REDACTED] the Central American democracies have clearly distanced themselves from US policy toward Nicaragua and affirmed their willingness to act in what they perceive to be their own best interests.

[REDACTED] The plan to place responsibility for humanitarian aid in the hands of an international commission will probably preclude direct US assistance to the Contras within a few months. The net effect of the peace accord all but eliminates any chance over the longer term that the Contras will apply effective military leverage against the Sandinista regime. [REDACTED]

The plan calls for the demobilization and repatriation or relocation to a third country by 5 December 1989 of some 12,000 armed Nicaraguan insurgents encamped in Honduras. The Central Americans also agreed to request a UN-supervised peacekeeping force to monitor the region's borders and authorized the UN and OAS to observe the election in Nicaragua scheduled for next February. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The organization of the international role, both in the camps and along the borders, is still unclear, and the Contras themselves have repeatedly said they will not give up their arms. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] there is only a slight chance that the demobilization process will break down completely, which might occur if one of the signatories of the peace plan takes a unilateral action—such as Managua canceling its election. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

UN distribution of humanitarian aid for the Resistance will probably be an important factor in determining the pace of demobilization of the insurgents remaining in Honduras. The international commission is unlikely to assist armed insurgents, forcing the Contras left inside Honduras to choose between food and their weapons. [REDACTED] some combatants will be convinced to return to Nicaragua but that the vast majority will seek relocation elsewhere—significant numbers will hope to come to the United States. Honduras is likely to urge dismantling of the camps as soon as possible. Tegucigalpa has a vested interest in progress, because Managua will not drop its World Court case against Honduras until demobilization is completed. [REDACTED]

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are denied in its/their entirety.

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Scope Note

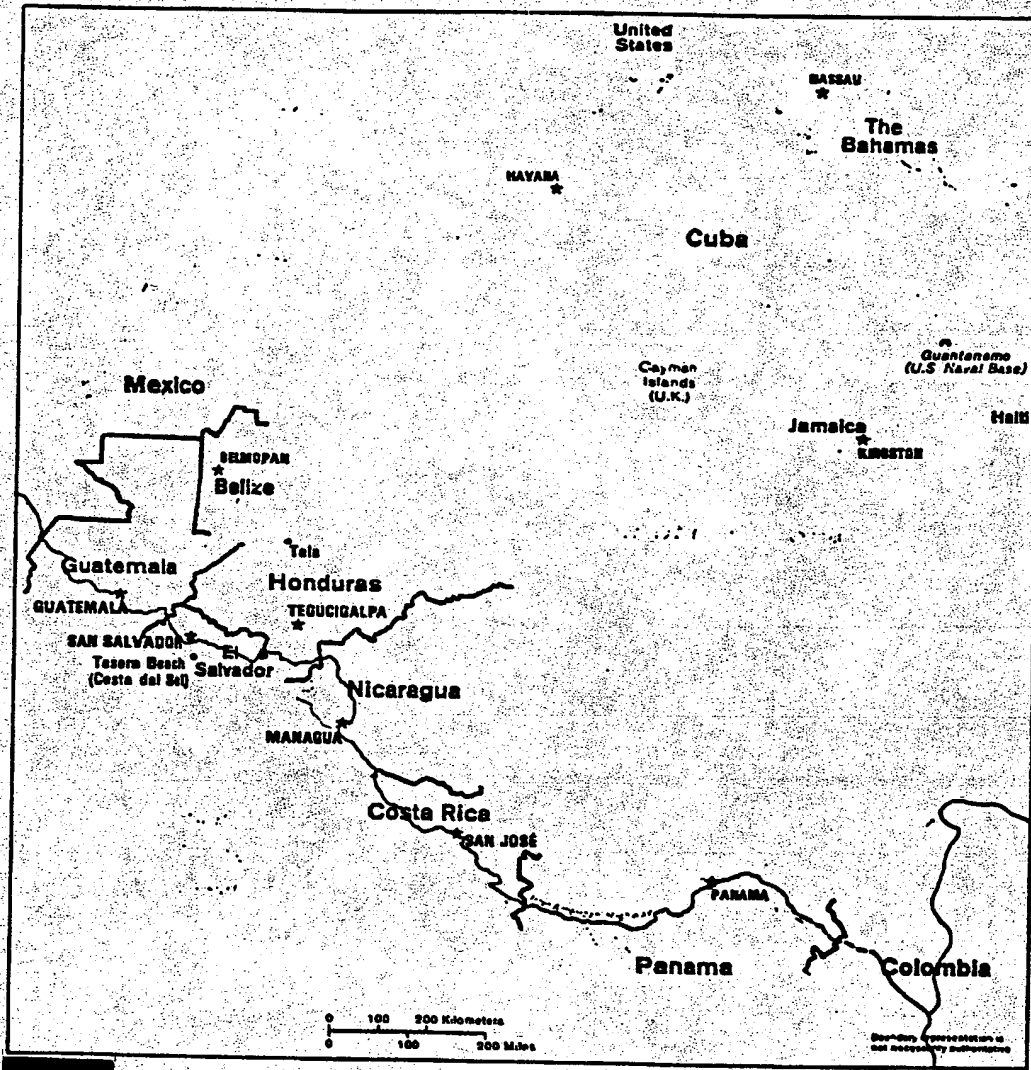
This Intelligence Assessment provides a preliminary look at the implications of the Central American presidents' recent decision to disband the Nicaraguan Resistance in exchange for Nicaragua's pledge to institute political reforms and hold internationally supervised elections. The paper examines the dynamics that the Tesoro Beach and Tela accords have introduced into the peace process, looks particularly at the expanded role the UN will play in implementing the accord, and discusses the challenges these developments pose for the United States. In addition, we make a preliminary assessment of the prospects for demobilizing, repatriating, or relocating the anti-Sandinista rebels by the December deadline and the likelihood that the Sandinistas will hold a free and fair election next February.



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The Central American Peace Process: Short-Term Prospects

Introduction

The Central American democracies' focus on regional peace issues in recent years has represented a significant departure from their more customary preoccupation with domestic concerns. This shift stems in part from the massive military buildup in Nicaragua since the overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1979 and from uneasiness over the Sandinistas' penchant for subverting their neighbors.

This paper discusses how these regional concerns drove the process that culminated in the peace accords reached at the 1989 summits at Tesoro Beach and Tela, and it examines prospects for implementation of the terms of those accords.

The Regional Setting

Negotiations toward achieving a workable Central American peace plan began in 1983 with the mediation of the Contadora group—Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Panama—but the halting progress of these negotiations encouraged widespread skepticism about prospects for success. Central American governments were hesitant to challenge Managua on political reform, failed to devise a unified strategy, and remained single minded about their individual security concerns. Even the signing in August 1987 of the Esquipulas II accord—which won its author, Costa Rican President Arias, the Nobel Peace Prize—failed to silence the skeptics. Indeed, the end

of 1988 saw scant progress on the plan, which bound countries with insurgencies to obtain cease-fires, required each state to stop aiding neighbors' insurgencies, and obligated governments to promote democratic processes:

- A cease-fire negotiated in early 1988 between the Sandinistas and the Contras still had not been implemented, and El Salvador and Guatemala had made no headway on holding talks with their respective insurgent groups.

- Nicaragua had done little to democratize its political system. Although Managua had made some concessions on press freedoms, it continued to restrict the activities of opposition groups. Most of the Central American democracies, moreover, were reluctant to take issue with political practices inside Nicaragua.

- The peace plan's bleak prospects were exemplified by Costa Rican President Arias's failure to get his own legislature to ratify participation in a new Central American parliament that had been stipulated under the Esquipulas II agreement.

Nevertheless, a convergence of interests kept peace efforts alive.

President Arias's determination to see his plan survive were among the factors maintaining a semblance of momentum, but it was Managua's and Tegucigalpa's shared desire to end the anti-Sandinista presence in

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Key Provisions of the Proposed Central American Parliament

1. Each of the five Central American signatories will send 20 popularly elected deputies, each serving a five-year term. Deputies are not obliged to support their government's policies.
2. Elections to the parliament are to coincide with national elections. (Costa Rica's four-year election cycle would have to be constitutionally changed to meet this requirement.)
3. The parliament's mission is to discuss regional political, economic, and cultural concerns and to encourage the process of regional integration. Decisions made by the parliament are not legally binding.

The parliament will be located in Guatemala City.

Honduras that was most responsible for preserving the regional peace process.

By early 1989, the Central Americans had begun to take steps to ensure a successful summit at Tesoro Beach in El Salvador in February. Meeting on the fringes of inaugural ceremonies for new Latin American presidents in Mexico (December 1988) and Venezuela (February 1989), the region's foreign ministers drafted a joint letter to the UN Secretary General requesting a multilateral force to patrol borders and verify that no country was aiding another's insurgents. Nicaragua, in meetings with fellow Central Americans during the inauguration of Venezuela's new leader, unveiled a detailed proposal for removing the Contras from Honduras.

The Tesoro Accord and Tela Declaration

The agreement signed by the Central American presidents at Tesoro Beach in February helped put the regional peace process back on track, but it did not settle enough specifics to make implementation possible. Nicaragua promised at Tesoro Beach to institute electoral and media reforms and to hold internationally supervised national elections in return for a Central American pledge to devise a plan—within 90 days—to dismantle and repatriate the Nicaraguan Resistance. The deadline went unmet, however, and it was not until the summit at Tela, Honduras, in August that the Central Americans signed off on a plan to demobilize the Contras, to ask for a UN border-monitoring force, and to urge Salvadoran guerrillas to agree to a cease-fire and talks with the government.

Demobilizing the Nicaraguan Resistance

The Tela plan to eliminate the Contra force represented a victory for the Sandinista regime, which had proposed a similar plan at Tesoro Beach. Managua's dramatic, eleventh-hour electoral accord with its internal political opponents—which was signed the day before the Tela summit began and called for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation, or relocation of the Contras—effectively prevented the democracies from opposing Managua on this issue.

The Tela declaration called for the creation by 6 September of an International Support and Verification Commission and the completion of the demobilization process within 90 days after the international commission is formed, or no later than 5 December. In addition to developing the mechanism for demobilization, the international commission must also take responsibility for resettling the disarmed Nicaraguan insurgents and verify that conditions inside Nicaragua are conducive to their rejoining the economic and political life of the country. To encourage their repatriation, the agreement specifies that Managua should meet with the Contras to urge their return. The international commission is to visit the Resistance camps to explain the plan, assume responsibility for

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the distribution of humanitarian aid, and assist those not wishing to be repatriated to move to a third country.

Monitoring Cross-Border Insurgent Activities

Another major accomplishment at Tela was the revitalization of a plan to request a UN security force in Central American border areas where guerrillas are operating. Although the presidents had agreed to ask for such a force at the Tesoro Beach summit, Honduras had subsequently placed a hold on the process pending Managua's withdrawal of its World Court suit charging Tegucigalpa with illegally aiding the Nicaraguan rebels. Managua, however, agreed at Tela to temporarily suspend the suit and withdraw it completely once the international commission certifies that the demobilization process is complete.

The deployment of the UN border force is an essential element of the Tela agreement. The Hondurans are adamant about the need to control the anti-Sandinista

rebels and not involve their own troops in the process.

For its part, Nicaragua has publicly expressed reservations about preparing for elections while a hostile force continues to operate on its border and apparently believes a UN force could expose some cross-border movements by the Contras.

Promoting Democracy in Nicaragua

The Tela agreement made no new demands for Nicaraguan democratic reforms, primarily because the domestic political opposition's acceptance of the electoral accord preempted the democracies' attempts to pressure the Sandinistas. Managua, for its part, insisted that it had proceeded with the political reforms promised at the Tesoro summit despite the

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The Tela Declaration

The declaration calls for the Secretaries General of the UN and OAS to form the International Support and Verification Commission by 6 September 1989 and gives them sole responsibility for all activities required to demobilize, relocate, and repatriate the Nicaraguan Resistance (RN), which include:

- Visiting RN and refugee camps to organize and direct distribution of humanitarian aid.
- Certifying that the Sandinistas issue documents ensuring the personal rights of RN who want to repatriate.
- Accompanying the repatriated to their place of origin or residence in Nicaragua.
- Establishing and controlling temporary residence areas inside Nicaragua for repatriates.
- Supervising the provision of economic and technical aid and land to repatriates.
- Establishing reception centers to provide basic social services to refugee and RN families and creating offices to investigate repatriate complaints against the Sandinistas.
- Relocating in third countries RN who do not wish to be repatriated and ensuring the Sandinistas issue passports to these people.
- Establishing procedures for surrendering weapons and war materiel.
- Verifying that demobilization is completed no later than 5 December and issuing a report by mid-December.

It establishes a formula for Nicaragua to drop its World Court case against Honduras once the Contras are demobilized. The declaration also designates Nicaragua as the host of the next summit, set tentatively for December 1989.

delay in dismantling the Contras. As proof of their intentions, the Sandinistas point to the electoral accord, to the nearly 2,000 ex-national guardsmen pardoned in early March, and to Managua's invitation to the UN, the OAS, and other international observers to verify the fairness of the national election scheduled for February.

Dealing With the Salvadoran Insurgency

An important element of the Tela agreement was its explicit inclusion of the Salvadoran guerrillas in the peace process. With an agreement on the books to dismantle the anti-Sandinista insurgency, the Central Americans almost certainly recognized that the war in El Salvador remained the greatest impediment to regional peace—and, therefore, merited at least a hearing at the summit.

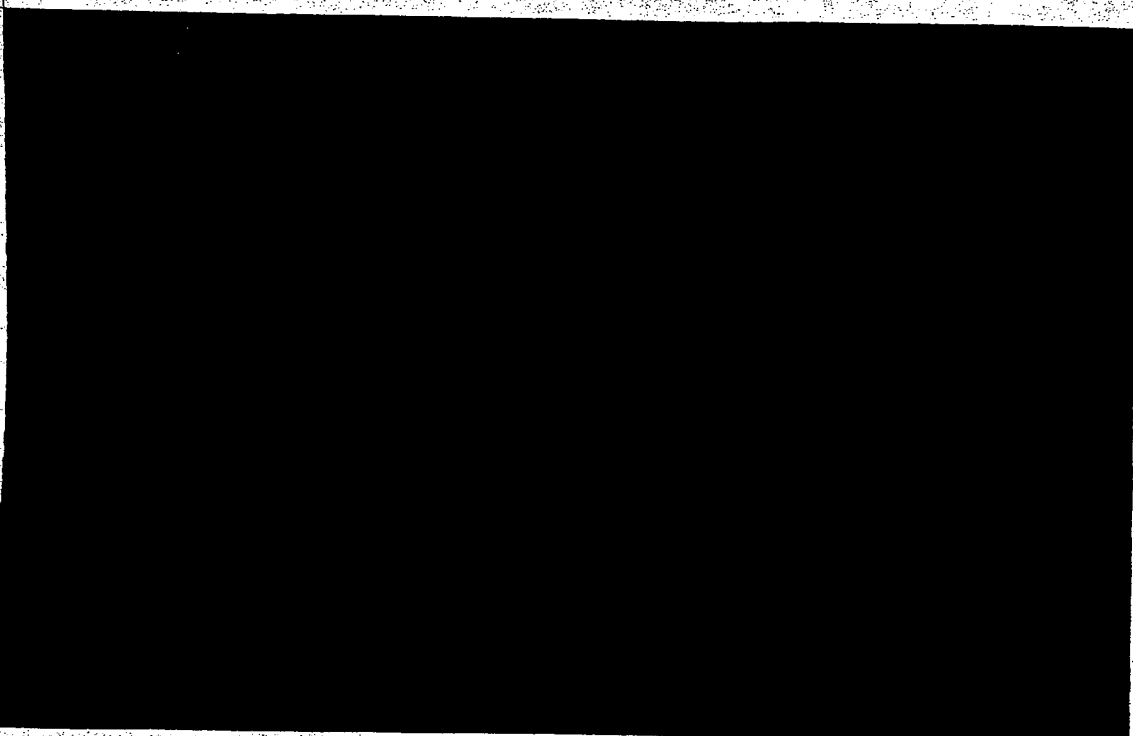
Cristiani came prepared to press the Nicaraguans by demanding simultaneous demobilization of the Nicaraguan Resistance and El Salvador's Faribundo Marti Liberation Front and an immediate end to Managua's support of the Salvadoran rebels. Although the final document fell short of these goals,

He obtained a specific call for the Salvadoran rebels to end hostilities and enter into a direct dialogue with his government.

Outstanding Issues

Despite the progress made at Tela on a plan to demobilize the Contras and authorize deployment of a UN border force, two significant issues stand in the way of timely implementation.

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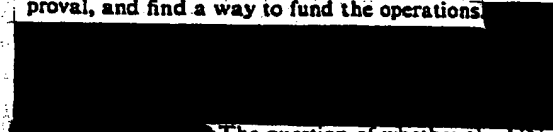
~~Secret~~**Organizing the International Role**

Many details concerning the involvement of international organizations still need to be finalized.



Details on administration and chain of command will have to be worked out between the two international organizations.

Although the UN has been working since mid-1987 on contingency plans for deploying troops to Central America to monitor cross-border insurgent activities, the UN Secretary General still must clarify the size and scope of the force, obtain Security Council approval, and find a way to fund the operations.



The question of whether the UN-sponsored troops will be armed has also not been settled.

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The international commission responsible for Contra demobilization also needs to be organized and funded, although the UN High Commission for Refugees, well-versed in handling refugees spawned by civil wars, is probably prepared to take the lead. The international commission, however, must locate the funds needed to support the Nicaraguan Resistance in the camps, to cover the expenses associated with their resettlement in Nicaragua, or to relocate them and support them in yet-undetermined third countries.

Contra Reaction

Contra reaction is the second major uncertainty in the peace process

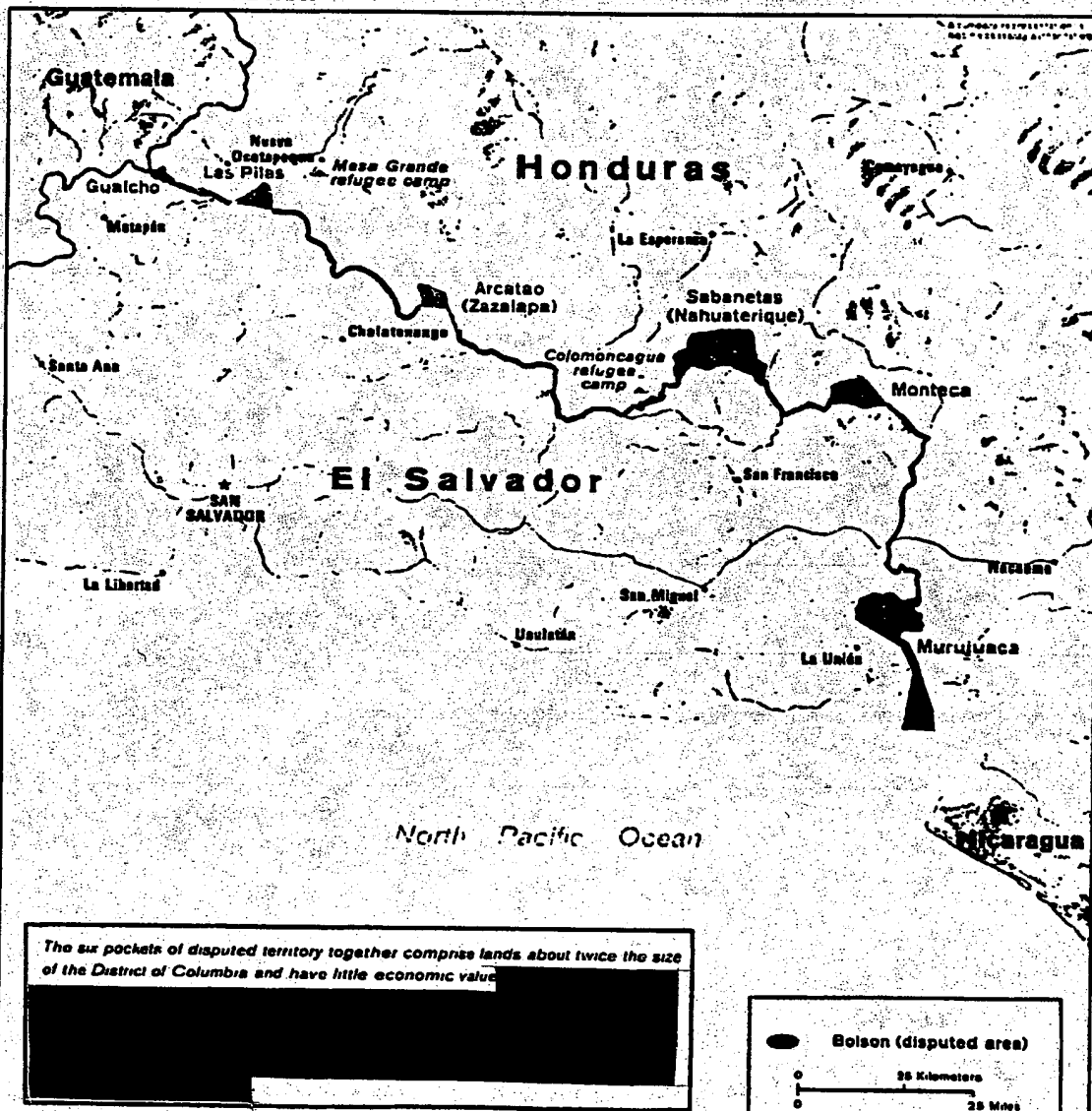
The international commission would be responsible for resettling these individuals.

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Figure 2
Honduran-Salvadoran Border



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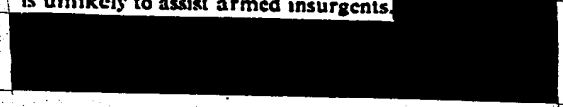
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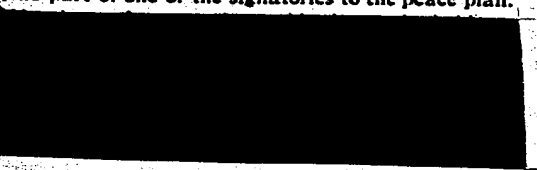


Distribution of humanitarian aid for the Resistance will probably be an important factor in determining the pace of demobilization. Under the terms of the Tela declaration, the UN and OAS can assume the task of distributing aid themselves or ask other groups, such as the International Red Cross, to do it. Regardless of which group directs the disbursement, it is unlikely to assist armed insurgents.



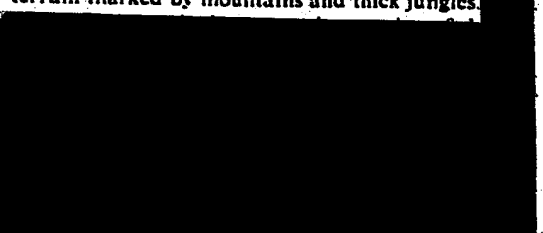
Other factors are likely to affect implementation of the plan. For example, Honduran interests favor implementation because the Tela declaration requires the international commission to certify that demobilization is complete before Nicaragua drops its World Court case against Honduras—a matter of prime importance to Tegucigalpa. Honduras is likely, therefore, to facilitate the work of the international organizations and to urge the dismantling of the camps as soon as possible. Nicaragua, for its part, probably will actively pursue talks with Contra forces to encourage them to repatriate. The willingness of other countries to accept those insurgents and family members who do not choose to repatriate also will have an impact on the pace of implementation.

[redacted] a breakdown could be precipitated by a unilateral action on the part of one of the signatories to the peace plan.



Impact of the UN Border Force

[redacted] the UN peacekeeping force will face a daunting task in monitoring the cross-border activities of guerrilla forces that generally operate in rugged terrain marked by mountains and thick jungles.



The small number of troops projected for the force—100 to 200 men—suggest that it will have to concentrate most of its attention on monitoring the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.

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~~Secret~~**Contra Reinfiltration and Combat Prospects**

Nicaraguan Resistance forces are likely to have little difficulty reinfiltrating into Nicaragua, despite the presence of an international observer force. The extremely rough terrain along the northern and southern Nicaraguan borders has allowed relatively low-risk movement of combatants, both the Sandinistas in the 1970s and the Contras in the 1980s.

With the winding down of the war over the last 18 months, combatants, as well as couriers bearing money and supplies to units in country, have moved with relative freedom.

Small groups of guerrillas will continue to use Honduras and Costa Rica for refuge. Without the tacit acceptance of the Contra presence by San Jose and Tegucigalpa, however, the guerrillas probably will be forced to confine themselves to remote areas, diminishing their ability to draw on local supporters for food and medical assistance.

The combat capabilities of these Contra forces will be extremely limited. They are confident of their ability to live inside Nicaragua for long periods without external resupply.

Rebel commanders have consistently claimed continued popular support despite intense Sandinista efforts to break up their local infrastructure.

In response, the Sandinistas

probably will increase patrolling along known infiltration routes and step up harassment of suspected collaborators. Routine contacts with Sandinista patrols are almost certain to grow, and rebel units may attack small Sandinista garrisons and truck convoys to replenish ammunition stocks and obtain other needed materiel. Nonetheless, insurgent commanders are confident of their ability to avoid large-scale military confrontations with regime forces. Although not likely to pose any real threat to Managua, such activity would remain an irritant for the Sandinistas and a drain on scarce resources.

Nicaraguan Democratization

Although the agreement with the opposition will provide some protection against flagrant electoral abuses, Sandinista control of the Supreme Electoral Council, the military, and the security services will still permit the manipulation of the voting process, if necessary. For now, however, Managua appears confident that the advantages of incumbency and the weaknesses of the internal opposition will produce a Sandinista victory without the need to engage in blatant, excessive fraud.

The Salvadoran Question and the Longer Term

The Tela agreement has given some momentum to ongoing efforts to establish a dialogue between the Salvadoran guerrillas and the government of President Cristiani, but it is not likely to have much impact on the course of the Salvadoran civil war.

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